

He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not by punto_y_coma

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Summary:

He was about Eddie's age, tall and lanky, dark eyes, dark hair, big glasses. He was wearing a bright, Hawaiian print shirt, greyish-brownish pants, and black muddy boots; he looked like an orange stargazer lilly, a rarity, an eyesore.

Flower Shop AU: I'm allergic to flowers but I work in a flower shop - you're a customer who's very confused as to why I'd do that.

He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not

Author's Note:

Just some saccharine fun for these middle aged
dudes < 3
Hope you like it!

It all started one overcast Thursday morning. Eddie was cleaning the shop, obsessing over minutiae, as per usual. There were always new petals falling on the floor, a new delivery coming, a rogue flower that wasn't in the right place...

The thing about working with flowers was that making arrangements and tying bows was just the last of it. The main part was keeping them alive for as long as possible. Stem-cutting, water-changing, cropping... In that sense, it was as close as Eddie would get to nursing and doctoring, well into his late thirties, knowing he had absolutely no intention of going back to school in the near future.

Anyway, Eddie was in the middle of it, when the guy arrived. He was about Eddie's age, tall and lanky, dark eyes, dark hair, big glasses. He was wearing a bright, Hawaiian print shirt, greyish-brownish pants, and black muddy boots; he looked like an orange stargazer lilly, a rarity, an eyesore. Eddie winced; it wasn't lost on him that they looked like polar opposites, Eddie wearing a baby blue shirt with a white apron, both perfectly ironed and clean.

"Morning," Eddie smiled in his direction, "looking for anything in particular?"

"Yeah, well, not sure," the guy scrunched his face, looking around the shop with the same kind of overwhelmed awe of a toddler walking into a contemporary art museum.

"What's the occasion?" Eddie asked.

"Hmm?" the guy finally turned to look at Eddie.

"First date? Anniversary? Weird auntie's birthday?" Eddie listed

quickly. "Funeral?"

"Yeah, nothing like that, uh-" the guy scratched the side of his face. "It's for an apology, I guess? Just something that says: 'I'm sorry, I've been a piece of shit, I've got literally no excuse'."

Eddie chuckled under his breath. A funny guy that was probably a cheater, why wasn't he surprised?

"So very expensive, very flashy, very romantic," Eddie put his rubber gloves on and started picking out a selection of the most pricey flowers.

"Maybe hold the heart ribbons and life-sized cupids," the guy deadpanned dryly. "I don't want us to get back together or anything like that."

"Noted," Eddie said, thinking to himself that maybe he had judged the guy too harshly.

Eddie had to reassess his first impression yet again when the guy showed up the following week.

"Hey, buddy!"

"Hey," Eddie replied.

"So, the flowers killed," the guy smiled with his entire face in a charming, sort of unassuming way. It wasn't uncommon to have customers come back and thank Eddie, it was one of his favorite things of the job when they went back and told him how much their mother had liked the roses or how they'd gotten a second date. And so what came out of the guy's mouth was a bit unexpected: "I'm going to need another one."

"Okay?" Eddie eyed him suspiciously. "Anything different?"

"Nah, if it ain't broke don't fix it, right?" the guy said.

"Right," Eddie furrowed his brow and got to work.

~

The guy went back to the shop, every week, almost religiously. And, like the local drunk at a bar, he'd ask for his usual with a soft smile and such confidence that it almost impressed Eddie. Almost. The guy had tried to start up a conversation as Eddie worked many times, telling jokes, asking about the business and the flower's names (for whatever reason he found them hilarious). Eddie had tried to keep his distance until one day he didn't.

"I don't mean to intrude," Eddie started cautiously, curling the ends of the ribbons as he spoke, "but what's up with all these arrangements?"

"What's your name?" the guy deflected.

"Edward."

"Well, Eddie," the guy bent over awkwardly like he was an origami figure, putting his elbow on the counter and his head on his hand in a sort of dreamy-teenage-girl way, "I would love to hear your theories, and then tell you all about it," the guy smiled and added as an afterthought: "My name's Richie, by the way."

"Uh," Eddie averted the guy's gaze and continued to add greenery to the arrangement, even though it was fine as it was already. He had thought about this, because of course he had, but not all his theories were okay to share with some guy off the street who, to be perfectly honest, was actually very good for his business. So, he started off slow. "Well, I'm guessing you're giving them to different people; getting the same arrangement for the same person every week seems like overkill..."

"Right. Go on, Sherlock," encouraged Richie. "Do your worst. I promise I'll keep buying here."

"My worst?" Eddie cocked his head as if testing how honest he was being, Richie nodded. "I- I think the most far-fetched one would be that you're a serial killer and you're leaving the flowers for your victims."

Richie cackled like he had been given the most wonderful surprise. "No, good one, but no," he started playing with one of the loose leaves that were lying on the counter. "Anything else?"

"At first, I thought you were just a regular cheating boyfriend but with the amount of flowers you're buying you'd have to be a sex addict or something like that," Eddie shrugged, dismissing his own theory easily.

"Aw, you give me too much credit, Eds," Richie said.

"Eddie," he corrected him sternly.

"Eddie," Richie repeated, smiling like being told off was his love language. "I don't have enough game for that shit," he gestured at himself in a as-you-very-well-know kind of way but gazed at Eddie somewhat hopefully. "You were right about the addict bit, though."

Eddie stopped mid-motion as he cut some cellophane. "Oh?"

"I'm a recovering alcoholic," Richie explained; the way he rubbed his stubble in embarrassment while keeping a slight smile reminded Eddie of a kid admitting to some mischief.

"So, you're making amends?"

"Yeah. I felt it would be kind of lame to just show up, holding nothing," he mimicked the action of holding air, trying to be funny but not really succeeding to lighten the mood, so he buried his hands in his pockets. "I was always the one that brought the wine bottle for gatherings and shit, you know? The empty hands just remind me of it, so..."

It didn't sound like a rehearsed speech, not like most of the jokes he had thrown at Eddie, all polished and ready to impress. No, this felt like something he rarely talked about. And Eddie didn't know what he had done to earn his trust.

"I'm- I- I think it's a very nice gesture," he said, talking slower than usual, choosing his words carefully.

"They have liked the flowers, which was the point, I guess. But it's been easier for me too, so..." Richie shrugged, looking at the ground sheepishly.

"I'm glad I could help, even just a bit," Eddie said fondly, fighting the

impulse to reach across the counter to touch Richie, to comfort him in some small way. He settled for handing him his flowers. "There."

"Thanks, buddy," Richie placed the money on the counter. "See ya next week!" he hollered as he walked through the door.

~

Of all the improbable things that Eddie could have imagined five years ago, getting a flower shop in upstate New York and becoming friends with an alcoholic customer were definitely on the bottom of the list. Richie had become sort of a staple of his working week, visiting even when he didn't buy anything, ranting endlessly while Eddie worked. When Richie told him that he was a stand-up comedian, it made all the sense in the world. Oftentimes, it felt like Richie was workshoping his new material on him, but Eddie didn't mind. It felt like it had been a long time since he had laughed that much, and a part of him felt special that Richie cared about his opinion, even on something as banal as dick jokes. It wasn't only that he found Richie funny; he had started to care for him. Eddie found himself taking note of whenever he mentioned an ex, how fondly he talked about them, whatever. Then of course there was the fact that he found Richie attractive, even with his terrible shirts and his weird voices and his receding hairline. Still, he hadn't worked up the nerve to ask him out or even just suggest they see each other outside of the shop. Their relationship seemed delicate, like an orchid, the slightest change might fuck it all up.

~

"Hey, Eds!" Richie looked positively radiant with energy as he walked to the counter. "Wow, you look awful, dude," he mumbled once he got a good look at Eddie.

"Fuck you too, Richie," he replied. It didn't have the desired effect with his stuffy nose and a sneeze to punctuate the end of the sentence. Eddie looked a little pathetic as he tried to hide his red face while blowing his nose.

"I'm serious! You okay?" Richie reached out to touch his face but stopped halfway, thinking better of it or maybe embarrassed of the

instinct itself.

"Oh, it's just allergies," Eddie waved a hand dismissively.

"To what?"

Eddie took a deep breath and braced himself. "Flowers."

"Wait, you're allergic to flowers and you own a flower shop? Are you crazy?!" Richie screamed.

"Not certifiably," Eddie replied with a weak smile. "Look, it's fine," he sneezed again, "usually I can manage fine with meds but I ran out and I have a delivery coming today," he was talking frantically and running out of air every few syllables. "It's not a big deal."

Richie had buried his face in his hands in the middle of his speech, like he was just exhausted from listening to how dumb Eddie was being, or maybe he actually cared... Either way, at the end of it, he looked up at Eddie and gave him a comforting smile.

"Okay, so what we're going to do is this: You're going to go get your meds and go home. I'll wait here for your fucking delivery and close shop. Then, I'll go get you some chicken soup and maybe get you an appointment to get that weird brain of yours examined, yes?" He untied Eddie's apron and pushed Eddie out of the shop. "I'll see you in a bit," he promised.

~

Eddie went home, took a hefty dose of antihistamines and lied on his couch, his TV playing some crime procedural that he wasn't following. He must have fallen asleep at some point because the next thing he knew was that Richie was knocking on his door.

"As promised," he said, handing him a lukewarm container with what Eddie supposed was chicken soup.

"I thought you were joking," Eddie's voice sounded closer to normal, not so raspy.

"I only joke when I'm being paid," Richie said dryly, earning an

incredulous stare from Eddie. "Fine. I might work overtime but that's what an *artiste* does," he added. There was an awkward pause as they stood immobile at Eddie's door. "Are you gonna ask me in or...?"

"Yeah, no, definitely," said Eddie stupidly. "Sorry, I'm drowsy as fuck," he apologized, moving to the side so that Richie could go in.

"You'll be happy to know," Richie started, taking in Eddie's apartment, "that the roses are alive and well. I thought the delivery would be something fancier or creepier, like baby's breath!"

Eddie shook his head, walking towards the kitchen to warm the soup. "I've told you a million times, Rich, baby's breath is a tiny, unimpressive, cheapass flower."

"Yeah, but what a name!"

Eddie rolled his eyes and froze like he had just remembered something vital. "Did you-?"

"Put your precious roses in fresh water and pumped them with protein powder?" Richie finished for him in a haughty voice. "Why, yes, Edward. I do notice the things you do at the shop, not just how pretty you look, thank you very much."

Eddie felt himself blush at both the compliment and being told off. "It's not protein powder," he mumbled, "it's flower food."

"Whatever, dude," Richie found a chair and let himself fall on it gracelessly. "You feeling any better? You look better."

"Thanks, yeah," Eddie dodged his gaze. "Just sleepy."

"Why do you do this to yourself? Is the flower business really that lucrative? Did the Bee Movie lie to me?" Richie had hidden that sincerely concerned first question among the other very stupid ones.

"Asshole," Eddie replied flatly. "It's a very long story," he shrugged. Richie put his listening face on, head on hand, like that first time they had talked properly at the flower shop. Eddie sighed. "Fine. I guess it's not that long. I was a risk analyst, uh," he paused unsure of where to go from there.

"Wow, that bad?" Richie said, almost involuntarily, it seemed.

"Oh, shut up," Eddie replied, without much bite. "I was a risk analyst, a workaholic, filthy rich and unhappily married," he cleared his throat. "Point is: I burnt out, bad. I lost my shit at work, resigned in the middle of a very public tantrum. I guess it was just a matter of time, really... Uh- The judge mandated some therapy-"

"Judge?" Richie's eyes were wide as saucers.

"Yeah, I might have broken a couple of glass doors when I threw my chair across my office," Eddie stared at the soup as it started to boil, mainly to not look at Richie. This wasn't Eddie admitting to an addiction but he was admitting to being fucked up, so it was pretty damn close. "There was a lawsuit, the works. So the judge mandated some therapy. Apparently, working high-stress jobs can fuck you up pretty quickly. High blood pressure, low life expectancy, anxiety attacks, ya-da ya-da..." he poured the soup into a bowl and blew on it, saw the steam fly away towards Richie. "I decided to get a divorce, move and do something else. There was this old lady selling her flower shop and I just bought it, without even thinking about it."

"Sounds unlike you," Richie mumbled.

Eddie looked at him for the first time since *Confessional Hour with Richard* had begun.

"Yeah. Uh- I found out I was allergic on the first day of deliveries," Eddie shrugged. "By then it was too late and I saw that if I popped a pill every morning, I could manage."

Richie was looking at him like a puzzle he wanted to solve, or maybe like a painting he wanted to memorize. Something.

"How'd you not know you're allergic to flowers at the age of thirty? That's what I can't understand."

Eddie winced. *Oh, that's another funny story, great to impress a cute guy*, he thought. "Okay, don't judge," he warned Richie, pointing a spoon in his direction.

"I won't," he said. "I'm an alcoholic stand-up comedian, I'm the literal

butt of the joke, Eds."

"Not what I meant," Eddie wasn't actually worried he was going to make fun of it; he was worried about the pity. "Just know that I'm fine now, yes?"

"Noted," Richie said.

"So, my mom had Munchausen's," Eddie waited a second for a hum of recognition but all he got was a blank stare. "Basically, she was mentally ill and made me believe I was sick so I grew up thinking I had asthma and I was allergic to everything," he said it fast, like that would make it seem less important. "Turns out she was right about one thing."

Richie remained quiet for a moment and then said lightly, like they were discussing football rankings: "I mean, it's a number's game, right? She had to be right about something."

Eddie sighed in relief. "Yeah. And it's not even a severe allergy, it won't kill me."

Richie nodded. Maybe, with time, he'd connect the dots and figure out that this was Eddie's way of breaking free, of proving his mother wrong, of doing what made him happy in his own terms.

"I'm so glad I didn't use my infamous Your Mom jokes on you, Jesus," Richie said finally.

"Ugh, me too," Eddie sat next to him, playing with his spoon and the contents of his soup bowl. "Why didn't you?"

"I was trying to impress you, I s'ppose," Richie pursed his lips.

"And yet you told me about a hundred and fifty dick jokes," Eddie arched his eyebrows.

"I was trying to be flirty and somewhat put together, Eds. My jokes have layers, I contain multitudes," Richie replied to the ceiling.

"Flirty?" Eddie repeated.

Richie nodded; he looked like he had melted on the chair, languid, almost liquid, like he was finally giving up and going with the flow and letting whatever happened happen.

"You don't need to say anything," Richie said, suddenly standing up. "Focus on getting better, we'll talk tomorrow," and with that he left Eddie's apartment.

~

Eddie was upset. (Or unsettled. Or worried. He had looked at an online thesaurus that morning and found it lacking.) He checked his hair in the reflection of the window.

"Shit, shit, shit, shit, *shit*," he muttered, the muscle of his jaw locked, his eyebrows so furrowed they looked like one continuous and unhappy line. He took some withered flowers that belonged in the trash and started picking at their petals one by one, nervously. He realized that he yearned and dreaded Richie's arrival in equal measure.

When Richie had left the day before, and once the drowsiness had passed, Eddie had been left with so many questions he could hardly stand it. Why would he say that? Was that a joke? Did Eddie want it to be a joke? What did Eddie want? *What the fuck did he mean?* All circling his head, over and over, insistent, like bees. And so, when Richie walked in, the first thing that Eddie said was: "What the fuck did you mean?"

"Well, good morning to you too, dear friend," he replied in a voice.

"*Dear friend!*" Fuck Richie! Fuck him and fuck his leather jacket! Fuck his long legs and fuck his boyish smile! "*What did you mean?!*"

"Eddie," he walked to the counter -to him- and took his funny man mask off. "Eds," his voice was pleading and his hand reached for Eddie's face, fingers brushing over his cheek. Richie was shaking, only a little. "Don't you know?"

Their eyes met, and Eddie couldn't think of anything but Richie, his eyelashes, his stubble, his lopsided smile.

"I-" Eddie hesitated but he knew well enough. He knew and he wanted to scream but the words didn't come out, trapped just behind his tongue, so he did the next best thing: He grabbed Richie's shirt, pulled him closer and kissed him.

Richie's fingers curled around his neck, kissing him back eagerly. Eddie realized his skin smelled of copper and leather and fresh cut grass, of summer and home. Richie pulled away first, mumbling something that sounded like: "Wait, I need to do this right."

He picked one perfect daisy out of the bunch Eddie had on display, drying the stem on his shirt.

"All good," he smiled and walked back to Eddie. "Eds," he presented the daisy flamboyantly, like an aristocrat in an old timey film, "my little rose-"

"That's a daisy," Eddie interrupted with a smirk.

"Eds, *my little rose*," Richie repeated, "wanna date?"

Eddie took the stolen flower and stared at Richie. "Alright."

"Yeah, baby!" Richie whooped and kissed him again. "I've got coupons for Chipotle," he said against Eddie's lips making him cackle.

"Our first date," Eddie said in mock outrage, giving Richie a peck every two or three words. "Is not. Going to be. In a *fucking Chipotle*!"

In all honesty, Eddie didn't care. As long as Richie was there.

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading! Kudos and comments are love

<3

Come talk to my at my tumblr (@aralisj) if you want

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